

Making lemonade from lemons: a case study on loss of space at the Dolph Briscoe, Jr. Library, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

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The setting for this case study is the Dolph Briscoe, Jr. Library, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, a health sciences campus with medical, dental, nursing, health professions, and graduate schools. During 2008–2009, major renovations to the library building were completed including office space for a faculty development department, multipurpose classrooms, a 24/7 study area, study rooms, library staff office space, and an information commons. The impetus for changes to the library building was the decreasing need to

house collections in an increasingly electronic environment, the need for office space for other departments, and growth of the student body. About 40% of the library building was remodeled or repurposed, with a loss of approximately 25% of the library's original space. Campus administration proposed changes to the library building, and librarians worked with administration, architects, and construction managers to seek renovation solutions that meshed with the library's educational mission.

INTRODUCTION

It can be said that nothing strikes fear in the heart of a library administrator as much as "losing" space, except perhaps budget cuts. In the last twenty years, the nature of libraries and their functions have changed dramatically, leading to speculation about how library facilities can best be reconfigured to accommodate changing use patterns. Physical collections of books and journals are being replaced by virtual collections of licensed products accessed through the Internet. Debate continues among campus and library administrators about the importance of the library as place and the library building [1–4]. On health sciences campuses, space for classrooms, research laboratories, and offices is an ever-present need. In this environment of changing library use and the crunch for space, it is not surprising that the library building is viewed as "ripe for the picking." This case study will explore how one academic health sciences library faced the challenge of losing space and survived to tell the tale.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

The Dolph Briscoe, Jr. Library is the central library for the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSC). UTHSC serves five schools: dental, health professions, medical, nursing, and a master's and doctoral degree-granting graduate school. The current student population numbers more than 2,500, with over 1,600 teaching, research, and clinical faculty. The Briscoe Library employs 17 librarians on the San Antonio campus, and support staff number 24.5 full-time equivalents. The UTHSC campus is located in suburban northwest San Antonio in the South Texas Medical Center complex, and the library's central location on campus makes it a popular place for students to congregate and study. In addition to the Briscoe Library, the UTHSC

Libraries include 4 branch libraries in San Antonio, Harlingen, and Laredo, Texas, and an active outreach program. The combined UTHSC libraries serve as a National Network of Libraries of Medicine resource library for thirty-three counties in south Texas.

The current Briscoe Library building was completed in June 1983, replacing the original library that was built in 1968 [5]. The Briscoe Library has weathered the years well and remains an attractive and well-used building; however, many physical adaptations were made to the original building over the years to accommodate changes in information-seeking patterns, such as expansion of teaching and computer lab space and reconfiguration of staff offices. Starting in the early 1990s, librarians, students, and faculty began the rapid adoption of online journals to replace the print format. Faculty began to visit the library virtually instead of physically coming to the library building, yet student use of the library continued to increase. As the current print journal, index, and abstract collections began to disappear and faculty used online resources from their offices, labs, and homes, both library and campus administrators began to plan for repurposing library space, sometimes with ideas and plans that were congruent and sometimes with divergent plans. The campus needed more research, office, and teaching space, and librarians knew that the library building was being looked at as prime real estate. Over a period of time, several faculty were housed in library study rooms, and space in special collections was remodeled to house two campus administrators and an administrative assistant, although these inroads into library space eventually reverted back to the library's control.

In 2002, a group of deans and campus administrators visited a number of libraries around the country to see how library space was being repurposed, particularly examining off-site storage. At about the same time, various library planning committees developed proposals for the future of the library,

Table 1
Summary of renovations and total square feet renovated, 2008–2009

	Before	After	Square feet renovated
Second floor, public	Computer lab, library computer hands-on classrooms, lecture classroom, study rooms	<i>Multipurpose classrooms, larger library computer hands-on classroom, 24/7 study space</i>	17,488
Second floor, staff	Offices for library technology staff, computer workroom, rare books and archives shelving, storage rooms	<i>Library technology staff office and small storage room</i>	1,361
Third (entry level) floor, public	Reference, circulation, shelving for current journals and indexes, computer workstations, open study space	Reference, circulation, <i>information commons, group study rooms, laptop stations</i>	8,745
Third floor, staff	Administration, collection resources, public services	Administration, collection resources, public services, <i>library technology, archives shelving</i>	970
Fourth floor, public	Print journals, classroom, individual and group study rooms	Print journals, classroom, individual study rooms, <i>offices for the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSC) Academic Center for Excellence in Teaching</i>	1,506
Fourth floor, staff	UTHSC South Texas Regional Information Services, interlibrary loan, drug information service (nonlibrary)	No change	—
Fifth floor, public	Print books, individual and group study rooms, conference room, special collections, history of medicine reading room	No change	—
Fifth floor, staff	Special collections staff offices, workroom	<i>Offices, rare books and archives shelving, archives processing workroom</i>	425
Total renovated space (sq. ft.)			30,495

Italics represent new construction.

including plans for repurposing space. In 2007, the executive director of libraries at the time presented a vision to campus administration for expansion of classroom, computer, and flexible study spaces and hosted a presentation about how other libraries had reconfigured their space in recent years.

Along with a demand for more office space, the campus required additional, flexible, multipurpose classroom space because of increased numbers of medical students. Despite efforts to maintain all usable square footage for library purposes, in 2008 campus administration approached the current executive director of libraries with plans to create offices in the library for staff of the UTHSC Academic Center for Excellence in Teaching (ACET), a department devoted to faculty development and excellence in teaching, and to remodel the second floor of the library building into classrooms and a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week (24/7) study space. Seeing no way to avert the changes, the library worked with medical school administration, campus architects, and the vice president for academic administration to design a space that would address library needs as well as the need for office and classroom space. Librarians provided conceptual drawings that they thought would work best for relocated staff offices, and the university architects approved the plan.

USE OF LIBRARY SPACE: BEFORE AND AFTER

The Briscoe Library building occupies approximately 84,900 total square feet on 4 floors. Prior to the renovation described in this case study, the library occupied 75,900 usable square feet, excluding mechanical and housekeeping space. During the renovation, 30,495 square feet or 40% of usable space underwent remodeling, and the library lost 25% of its

space to nonlibrary offices and classrooms. Renovations affected all 4 floors of the library. Table 1 shows the scope of the physical changes to the library and includes square footage for the spaces affected by construction.

The first renovation project was construction of a suite of offices for ACET in an area on the fourth floor that was occupied by group study rooms. Nine replacement study rooms were built on the entry level (third floor) of the library building, where shelving for current year journals and indexes had previously been removed.

Before construction could begin on the 2nd floor classrooms, a number of other changes were necessary to make accommodations for displaced staff, equipment, and stored materials. A suite of rooms was remodeled on the 5th floor to shelve rare books and archives that had been stored on the 2nd floor; archival storage shelving was also installed on the 3rd floor in the technical services area. The computer lab was relocated to the 3rd floor in a new information commons. An office for library technology staff and a computer storage room were constructed on the 2nd floor in a former bindery processing area. Three offices for displaced library technology librarians were built on the 3rd floor. Finally, classroom construction began in an area of approximately 17,488 square feet, about 23% of total usable building space.

Plans included construction of eleven multipurpose classrooms, each seating twenty-four students, and three smaller eight-seat rooms for small classes or group study. The large classrooms were designed to have sinks, moveable furniture and walls, and state-of-the-art instructional technology. An existing hands-on computer classroom was expanded to seat twenty-five students, and videoconferencing equipment was

upgraded. The second floor renovation was designed so that the floor could be closed off from the rest of the library to allow for a 24/7 study space with key card access.

The changes to library space were extensive but congruent with the library's educational mission. By agreeing to accommodate the ACET staff and the classrooms, the library was able to defer any immediate plans to take over space for faculty or administrative offices.

RENOVATION PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Since 2002, library and campus administrators had discussions about how to repurpose library space due to the shrinking size of the library's print collection, therefore, plans to use library space for other purposes did not come as a surprise. Throughout the renovation planning process, librarians were included in meetings with campus architects and administrators, and the renovation projects proceeded on schedule largely due to a diligent project manager and close attention to detail by librarians.

The initial request for ACET office space came in June 2007. Plans were finalized in January 2008, and construction took place during February to May 2008. This project was not funded by the library. Replacement group study rooms on the third floor were built with library funds that had been specifically awarded for one-time capital improvement projects. Planning began in January 2008, but construction was delayed until the end of the school year to minimize disruption to students. The project ran from mid-June to the beginning of September 2008. The second-floor, multipurpose classroom project, including renovations needed to accommodate displaced staff and resources, was completed by outside contractors and funded by an institutional fund. The project, which ran from December 2008 to December 2009, consisted of building offices for displaced staff, relocating rare books and archives, creating the third-floor information commons, and constructing the classrooms and a 24/7 study area.

OUTCOMES

In retrospect, the library renovation and loss of space had both positive and negative outcomes; however, in general the positive outcomes outweighed the negative. On the negative side, the prospect of losing space and in some cases being relocated to new offices was distressful to library staff. The sense of loss of control over a building that library staff have known and loved for many years was difficult to overcome. The multipurpose classroom project included a second entrance to the library, thus requiring an additional library security system and a staffed security desk during hours when the library is open. The library's space for storage and archives was severely reduced, prompting a need to address archives storage over the next few years as the archives collection continues to grow.

On the positive side, over time, staff seemed to get into the spirit of rejuvenating the library and worked well as a team on several related projects. In the process of renovation, the library installed new carpet to replace badly worn carpet, and all library staff received new furnishings that were designed specifically for computer use. Previous furniture was original to the twenty-five year old building and was not ergonomically designed for computer use, in addition to being worn and dated.

Through careful planning by librarians in conjunction with the vice president for academic administration, the library's educational mission has been enhanced by associating closely with ACET and by including student classrooms in the library building. At the time of this case study, multipurpose classroom construction was not completed, so any negative results of this classroom construction are not known at this time, but the assumption, with the exception of security concerns, is that bringing more students into the library building can be nothing but positive.

Moving computers out of the unstaffed 2nd floor lab to the 3rd floor was an opportunity to create a 8,745-square-foot information commons with improved electricity and data lines and new study rooms, which could certainly be perceived as a positive outcome of the renovation. Locating the information commons in close proximity to the library's circulation and reference desks enables students and other users of the library to more easily obtain assistance from library staff.

Public services division and library technology division librarians are now in the same office area, and this close proximity opens up possibilities for more collaboration among the two divisions. Library technology staff is now housed near the information commons, where they are available to help library users with technology questions. Students have benefited by having larger group study rooms, improved facilities for using their laptop computers, and a 24/7 study area. Instructional librarians envision opportunities in having state-of-the-art classrooms on the second floor. The library's computer classroom will be expanded from fifteen to twenty-five seats, with upgraded videoconferencing equipment and a high-tech teaching podium.

From a library administrator's point of view, one of the most positive aspects of the various renovation projects was that very little of the costs were drawn from the library's budget. Institutional funds paid for building the multipurpose classrooms, offices, and work rooms for library staff displaced by loss of space; improving electrical and data lines; moving computers and other equipment to the new information commons; and building offices for ACET. The library's budget paid for building of new group study rooms, replacement of staff furnishings, new carpeting, archival shelving, and special collections remodeling.

Communication was an important factor throughout the repurposing of the library building, as it is in

any project of this scope. The executive director of libraries and other librarians met several times with the student government association to describe renovation projects and to listen to and address student concerns about noise during peak study times and temporary loss of group study rooms. The library advisory committee was kept apprised of renovations during routine meetings, and the library's newsletter had frequent articles about renovation progress. The library's web team maintained a renovations blog that featured construction progress with photos of demolition and construction. Routine library staff meetings provided a forum for discussing renovations and airing staff concerns about how the renovations would affect staff.

CONCLUSION

Every library faced with a space crisis will have a different experience based on circumstances and their interaction with campus administration. At the Briscoe Library, the experience of losing space can best be characterized by the old adage, of "when life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Although given a choice, library staff would have preferred to manage the library's space on their own, the end result of repurposing the library's space has been mostly positive. Campus administration has generally been supportive of finding uses for library space that will enhance the educational mission of the university. Library staff have found new partners in the ACET staff, with whom they have much in common. Students are pleased to have new study space and a 24/7 study area.

In conclusion, it is quite certain that the use of library buildings will continue to change and evolve just as information technologies change and evolve. Librarians as stewards of library buildings will need to continue to be proactive and creative in negotiating the best futures for their buildings and spaces.

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